



UNDER FIRE

RICHARD PARKER
BASED ON THE DRAMA
OF ROY COOPER MCGUIRE
AUTHOR OF "UNDER COVER" AND "AUTHOR OF IT HAS TO ADVENTURE"
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SYNOPSIS.

The chief characters are Ethel Winkley, Henry Streetman and Capt. Larry Redmond. The minor characters are Sir George Wagstaff of the British admiralty and Charlie Brown, a New York newspaper correspondent. Ethel, a resident of Sir George's household, secretly married to Streetman, a German spy, though she did not know him as such. Captain Redmond, her old lover, returns to England after long absence. From him she learns the truth about Streetman; furthermore, that he has betrayed her simply to learn naval secrets. The European war breaks out. Ethel prepares to accompany Streetman to Brussels as a German spy in order to get revenge and serve England. Captain Redmond, Ethel and Charlie Brown turn up at a Belgian inn as the German army comes. She is Madame de Lorde. She begins to work with a French spy. The Germans appear at the inn. Madame de Lorde shows a German secret service medal and convinces the invaders that she is a German spy. Charlie Brown barely escapes execution. The secret telephone is discovered and Christophe is shot as a spy. Brown is ordered back to Brussels.

CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

"Say good-by to old Christophe for me!" he enjoined them. "Tell him I'm sorry I didn't get his chicken dinner, but better luck next time!" He held his hand out to the major. But hand-shaking fell outside German military etiquette. Major von Brenig saluted.

"I may warn you," Major von Brenig cautioned the American, "I may warn you that if you are found out the road to Brussels the consequences will be serious."

"In fact, you will be shot, my friend," Streetman said, to make the matter entirely clear. And he appeared not at all uneasy over the contingency. In fact, he impressed Charlie Brown as being irritatingly cheerful.

"I know you hope for the best," Brown told him. He could not deny himself that passing retort. "But don't worry," he told the major. "I won't miss Brussels road. And, Streetman, if you ever come to America, look me up! I'll give you one good time!"

"I fear he will never get to Brussels," von Brenig said somewhat pensively, after Charlie had gone. Certainly he wished the American no ill luck. But he knew that not all officers whom he might meet would prove to be Columbia men.

"It is his own risk," Streetman said. "He did not have to come here. . . . Now, major, there may be other spies. Would it not be best to replace the telephone and put a secret guard around this room? Then if anyone else comes to the telephone, we shall know."

The scheme appealed to Major von Brenig. Accordingly, they had ordered the man Otto to return the instrument to its hiding place. And stationing others where they might keep watch of the fireplace, and yet not be seen by anyone who entered the room, they instructed Lieutenant Baum to arrest the first person who approached the telephone.

"Report to me at once, in such an event," the major said.

"If necessary, shoot before any message can be sent," Streetman told him. The man from the Wilhelmstrasse then hurried away to see General Freund, promising to return to join the major and Captain Karl at dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Death Hovers Near Ethel.

Ever since she succeeded in inveigling Lieutenant Baum into revealing to her the secret of the fork in the road, Ethel had waited her opportunity to telephone the news to the French front. It seemed to her that the German intruders would never leave the public room, even for five minutes. Meanwhile she had hovered near. And at last she was convinced that the coast was clear.

Cautiously she opened the door and peered inside. She saw no one. So she stepped into the room. For just a few moments she hesitated, to assure herself that there was a lull in the movements of the enemy. Apparently they had withdrawn to spruce themselves up after their long march.

She nerved herself to her task. She stole to the fireplace, glanced over her shoulder for one last hurried survey of the room, and reached her hand out for the instrument. She had barely taken it up when she heard the command—

"Halt!"

Ethel turned. To her startled eyes the room seemed suddenly full of soldiers. And giving a little cry, she dropped the telephone upon the floor. Lieutenant Baum confronted her sternly.

"You are a spy for the French!" he said.

"No, no! Let me explain!"

He ignored her protest.

"Load!" He snapped out the order to his men. And as they obeyed Ethel cried:

"No, no, no! For God's sake don't shoot me like that!" Trembling, she stood there, while they covered her with their rifles.

Then another cry of "Halt!" rang out. This time the command came from the doorway. It was Larry Redmond who interrupted the grim business.

Lieutenant Baum turned to him in

surprise, while the German soldiers lowered their guns and saluted.

"What are you doing?" Larry demanded.

"A spy for the French!" Baum explained somewhat peevishly.

"A spy for the French, eh?" Larry said as he drew nearer. "Fraulein—"

he began. And then he stopped short. He had not recognized Ethel at first. But now they gazed at each other in amazement. "A spy, eh?" Larry repeated. "What makes you think so?"

"She went to use that telephone. It leads to the French," the lieutenant said.

"Excellent, excellent!" Larry told him. "But—I shall investigate this matter."

"But Major von Brenig—" Baum began.

Larry brought him up sharply.

"I am your superior officer!" he reminded the lieutenant. And at that the other saluted. "In ten minutes," Larry continued, "you will report to Major von Brenig that you captured the spy—that she is here in my charge, and will be he kind enough to come here directly."

"Yes, Herr Captain!"

"In ten minutes, Lieutenant! . . . It is for the fatherland!"

"Ten minutes!" Baum replied. And once more he saluted.

At a sign from Baum the soldiers withdrew, with the lieutenant leading the way.

Larry waited till the last man was out of the room and the doors had closed behind them. Then he sprang to Ethel's side.

"Ethel! They caught you at the telephone?" he cried.

"Yes!" That was all she could say, as she faced him pitifully.

"Then they knew; and 'twas a trap set for you?"

"Oh, Larry, what will happen to me?"

He tried to calm her fears.

"There, there, my darling—no more harm shall come to you!"

Already his active mind was formulating a plan for her relief.

"But what are we to do?" she asked. She felt helpless, incompetent to act, to devise any means for saving herself from the fate that hung over her.

"Now, my dear, since they know you're a spy there's no great chance for you to escape through their lines," he said. "So for the moment, go into that room—" he pointed out a door to her—"go in there, lock the door, and when they come back I'll do the best I can with a bit of explanation."

"Come!" . . . He started for the door of the room where he meant to hide her, when his foot caught on something—it was the padlock that was pushed through the hump of the trapdoor of the wine cellar—and he tripped and all but fell "Sure, tripping's a bad sign," he exclaimed. "I'll not be married this year. I—" He paused as a thought struck him—an inspiration.

"What the devil!" he shouted.

And at the same time Larry warned him to be careful.

"She must have one of our pocket flashlights," he said. "What a target it made of you, major! And in the dark you could not see her, could you?"

"No!" von Brenig admitted. "And she can pick off our men one by one as they go down unless we rush her."

Larry closed the door quickly.

"If I may make so bold as to suggest—" he began; and seeing that the major gave him permission to continue, he said, "If there is no way out of the cellar save that, why waste our men when all we need is to leave her there to starve—till there's no fight in her?"

"Why not leave her there forever?" von Brenig asked. He was above everything, a practical man.

"It's better still!—It's a just fate for a spy," Larry agreed.

"Baum—run a bayonet through the hump!" the major ordered. The padlock had fallen into the cellar unheeded when Larry first opened the trap.

"Later you will make the fastening permanent," von Brenig said.

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a flashlight from his pocket and crept down the steps as he talked. "Wait!" he said. And in another moment he had so placed the light at the foot of the stairs that its beams shone upward through the opening. "That's it, that's it!" he exclaimed delightedly. He was still standing upon the cellar floor. "The light's shining in your face! Look! Can you see me?" he asked.

"No, no! The light blinds me. I can't see you at all!" she told him. He came up quickly then.

"Good—good! Now listen . . . If somebody peeked down there, wouldn't they think a desperate woman was standing at the foot of these stairs waitin' to shoot the first man who tried to come down?"

Ethel stood there in the glare of the flashlight had listened to his plans.

"Yes—yes—I believe they would," she admitted, beginning to understand his scheme.

"And that's what we've got to make them believe. Now, hasten, harlin'—hasten!" . . . "This best best!" He led her behind the cigar counter, for he had suddenly abandoned his previous notion of concealing her in the adjoining room. "Go and hide!" he directed. And she crouched low in the shadow of the counter. "Ah! God is good to the Irish!" he exclaimed. "Have you a revolver?"

"Yes, Larry!" She produced a small, nicked weapon.

He took it from her.

"It's rather a toy," he said. "But I suppose it will shoot. Then don't let the sound of a shot frighten you into screaming. I've got to give myself a bit of a flesh wound just in the hand."

"No, no!" she exclaimed in increased alarm.

"With this it can be only a scratch," he said. "As soon as I shoot, duck and hide. . . . Now, here goes!"

He shot himself in the right hand, then handed the revolver back to Ethel, who immediately huddled behind the counter. Then Larry banged the trapdoor shut. And backing away from it, he waited for the men who as he knew would soon come running in.

In another moment they burst upon him.

"Herr captain—you are wounded!" Lieutenant Baum cried.

"It's nothing," Larry replied. And he proceeded to bandage his bloody hand with a handkerchief.

Others joined the startled knot of Germans—among the newcomers, Major von Brenig.

"The spy—the woman spy—where is she?" he asked.

Larry told him that the woman had escaped.

The major swore roundly at that.

And then Larry explained that she had suddenly produced a revolver and shot him. "Before I could draw my own revolver she'd got away," he said. "She raised the trapdoor at us, went down there," he continued, pointing to the floor.

The major remembered that there was no outlet to the wine cellar, and without hesitation he raised the trapdoor, to face a blinding burst of light. He backed away quickly.

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